

"Character Building - Our Concern"

I am Jim Hackney owner of Red Bell Preschool of Plymouth. Red Bell is a successful Preschool center that was established in 1957. I am concerned with the proposed rules that govern the cap size of each of the rooms. (Rule # 400.5105c Group size for preschool children & Rule# 400.5201b Group size for older toddlers) I am also concerned with the continuing education requirements for the caregivers, and the initial requirements for the young assistants. The level at which the standards have been raised seems excessive. Government regulation should be aimed at safety and minimum standards. Free enterprise is the backbone of our economics. Competition when left alone between businesses provides the consumer with the best service. I raise the standards for our school from this basis. We continue to strive to improve. Yet the intensity at which the rules have been drafted to change, risk having a negative effect on both the childcare concerns as well as a good business practice.

I encourage raising the standards in the childcare industry for the State of Michigan is in order. I believe their needs to be a balance between childcare concerns and a good business practice. It would behoove you to respect the opinion of centers in the area that are successful and use their input to help draft these rules. By successful I mean they are well established, pay their taxes, have a good reputation in their community. They minimize staff turn over, and keep a full program, with former clients coming back with other siblings because of their positive past experience. I believe respecting this open communication between the two would help blend the business and childcare concerns while raising the standards for our state regulations. This would limit stifling either of the two.

With the draft the way it is now, it has the potential to risk the following:

- Limit the quality of tools and supplies we can support our centers with -We have big rooms with eight or more activity centers in each. This supports more choices and independent thinking for the child. This also creates more social interaction with peers which leads to improved verbal interaction for each child. We have found the larger rooms, with extra staffing, prepares them well for kindergarten.
- Limit the quality of the facility - A better-equipped facility allows opportunity for the teacher to build a busy creative and flexible lesson plan. This in turn allows them to reach the different learning styles of most children. Also busy children create less discipline problems.
- Stifle affordable childcare for parents in our community - We have a lot to offer children at our center. Making it feasible for parents to allow their children to attend our center is a challenge. We have some parents who will care for 3-4 children in a home environment in order to save money. This leaves the child with even less educational opportunities.

- Limits the amount of financial support we can give towards continuing education - We are just now being able to afford (in the last 4 years) paying for extra hours, classes or offering classes to encourage our teachers to learn and minimize our staff turn over.
- Limiting the number of people who can work in the field - Good qualified parents, students and other assistant teachers will be overly challenged to be able to break into this industry. And the ones that do, might be motivated to move past early elementary into the schools.
- Laying off employees and make child/teacher ratios tighter - Three teachers in our rooms gives the child a opportunity to bond with all or find a special one that relates to their learning needs more. Also, laying off is not conducive for the economy we are in now.

Our center was built for the existing regulations. I cannot change the building structure in order for me to meet the new draft. I would be forced to disenroll up to 29% of our total students. We need these students for revenue to support our center and these good intentions listed above. We exceed the ratios (more staff than is required) and operate with harmony in our classrooms now. The cap is unnecessary, I don't think the state should govern this concern and put us in conflict with good business practice.

I am a responsible husband/father of two preschoolers, taxpayer and business owner. I bring income into the state of Michigan and am a productive source to the building of young families in the Plymouth Community. With 48 years of service and thousands of satisfied parents and children, I strongly encourage you to reconsider these proposed rule changes. Consider respecting the opinion of several successful centers from different communities in Michigan. And write these rules with the intentions of raising childcare minimum standards in the state of Michigan without compromising our good business practice at the same time.